

The Wednesday Word, July 17, 2013: Jesus, the Forgiver of Sins

Luke 5:21 “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

One of the remarkable things about Jesus is that He was always going around forgiving sins. However, to forgive sins is exclusively the divine prerogative and Jesus, if He is not God, has no business meddling in such affairs. If he’s not God, he’s a fraud! C.S. Lewis says of Christ’s forgiving sins,

“This is so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself. You tread on my toe and I forgive you---but what should we make of a man, himself untrodden on, who announces that he forgave you for treading on other men’s toes? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give this conduct.”

C.S. Lewis: Mere Christianity

Indeed, Christ was asinine if He were, in fact, not God. What is more, that is what you are calling Him if you do not believe He is God? You say He has forgiven your sins, but that He is not the Mighty God. He is, you say, a god or the Son of God, but not the almighty, eternal Yahweh made flesh. How then have your sins been forgiven? Only God can forgive sins! Men cannot forgive sins against God nor can the angels. Even holy men of God have no power to dispense forgiveness of sin against the offended, thrice Holy God.

If Christ Jesus were merely a good man or a prophet, He could not have forgiven sin. But, He was more than a man; He was the Redeemer, the God/Man. There should be no surprise, therefore, that Christ can and does forgive sins. He would be a very inept redeemer if He could not forgive those whom He has purchased with His blood.

When we discover Jesus in Luke 5, the religious leaders are exceedingly upset at Him. Christ has just declared forgiveness of sins to a paralyzed man. Of course, the Pharisees were furious for they rightly reasoned among themselves that only God could forgive sins. We must thank them for their accurate analysis of the situation. Being trained in the Old Testament scriptures, they would perhaps have thought of Yahweh’s great promise,

“I, even I, am He that blots out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isaiah 43:25).

They quite rightly recognized that Jesus, by forgiving sins, was claiming to be Yahweh. For the Pharisees, Jesus was involved in more than a serious error. He was guilty of nothing short of blasphemy. One definition of blasphemy is to assume for oneself the attributes of God, and this is exactly what Jesus did. It’s no wonder then that the Pharisees were enraged. They recognized what so many today fail to admit or grasp, and that is that Jesus claimed to be God.

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, then said, and I paraphrase, “OK fellas, I know that it’s no big deal to say the words ‘your sins are forgiven.’ The question is, have I the power to forgive this man all his sins? Is what I’ve said no more than words? After all, anyone can say ‘your sins are forgiven!’ But, as you know, only God can forgive sins. Now then, just so that you understand that I actually have the power to forgive sins, I’m going to heal this man. After all, if I tell him his sins are forgiven this may just be words. So watch this one: just so that you’ll know that I genuinely am God, I’m going to tell this poor paralyzed man to arise and walk.” And that is exactly what Christ did. And the man, what did he do? Why, He got up and walked thus demonstrating that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh.

And that's the Gospel Truth!